

Geoffrey
Geoffrey Birrell

4064 Skyline Drive,
North Vancouver, B.C.

12 Aug 65

Mrs. Maida Parlow French,
73 Grangemill Crescent,
Don Mills, Ontario.

Dear Maida,

Your letter of July 18th last contained a large order for me — to put down my impressions of both K and her mother (in as much detail as possible). I wonder if you realize that it is just over ⁴⁶ 49 years ago that I visited them. And, even though my memory has always been bad, it is worse than ever now. However I am glad to be of service.

Enclosed you will find a series of scrambled notes on all the things that come to mind about my visit to Meldreth home and the very kind occupants that I met there for the first time. My memories of that delightful holiday are fast dissolving in the mists of far gone days and it annoys me to realize thus that I am growing old and very decrepit. I hope that my jottings will prove to be of some help to you, and I will be glad to clarify or try to enlarge on any item that may mystify you.

Here's hoping that the biography will turn out to be a winner and I will then expect at least an autographed copy of it. Yes, we were very sorry to have missed you and Helen when you were out here. It would have been nice for us to have been able to show you around a bit. Let's hope we have better luck next time. By the way Laurence Parlow (Dr A L Parlow, 89 Oak Lane, Rochester 10, N.Y.) visited Meldreth a few weeks before I did. He may be able to help you. Give him my best if you write.

Sincerely,

Geof

4034 Spring Drive
North Vancouver, B.C.

12-11-55

Mrs. Linda Brown
78 Kensington Road
Don Mills, Ontario

Dear Linda,

Your letter of July 14th just contained a large order for me
— to put down my impressions of both K and her mother (in a much
detail as possible). I wonder if you realize that it is just over
10 years ago that I visited them. And, even though my memory has
always been good, it is worse than ever now. However, I am glad to be
of service.

Enclosed you will find a series of scribbled notes on all the
things that came to mind about my visit to Melba's home and the very
kind people that I met there for the first time. My memories of
that delightful holiday are fast disappearing in the haze of the years
days and it annoys me to realize that I am growing old and very
forgetful. I hope that my jottings will prove to be of some help to
you, and I will be glad to clarify or try to enlarge on any item that
may assist you.

Here's hoping that the biography will turn out to be a winner
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Barlow (Dr. L. Barlow, 93 Oak Lane, Rochester 10, N.Y.) visited Melba
a few weeks before I did. He may be able to help you. Give him my best
if you write.

Sincerely,

(103)

KATHLEEN PARLOW - VIOLINIST

First Sight

My first sight and contact with Kathleen was about 1912, when I was a mere school boy of about 15 years of age. My parents took me to Kathleen's solo concert at the old Russell Theatre in Ottawa. I remember that it was a good house and a fashionable one. My picture of Kathleen is completely blurred except that she was tall and slim. The music, of course, was over my head and beyond me entirely.

Meldreth

This charming little village, of about 200 or 300 souls, is situated about 10 miles from Cambridge and is about an hour's run from London. I cannot picture the village now but I remember that I liked it. The Parlow home was in the residential part of the village and, I believe, the Parlows owned it and were NOT renting it. The property was adequate but NOT pretentious by any means, with houses on each side of it. I feel that the Parlows were just beginning to find their feet in those days. I believe that there were borrowings and past debts that had to be serviced (interest) and I think that the Parlows had to live frugally and carefully. No doubt the war had greatly diminished their earning power, as there were no continental or Asian concert tours to be had. However, they lived most happily and comfortably in their charming house, and they seemed to have hosts of friends, of upper middle class status, living thereabouts in the countryside around Meldreth. (2)

House

The house, set behind a small front garden, appeared to be low even though it had two storeys. The upstairs had dormer windows and the ceiling was rather low. As I remember it, the property measured about 75' along the street and about 120' in depth. It was a perfect oblong shape. I do not remember a great deal about the building except that it had a fairly small square livingroom, lined with low book-shelves on all sides, and the stuffed chairs and sofa were covered with bright chintz. (2)

WATKINS' HOUSE - VICTIM

First night

My first night and contact with Watkins was about 1912, when I was a mere school boy of about 13 years of age. My parents took me to Watkins' sole concert at the old Russell Theatre in Ottawa. I remember that it was a good house and a fashionable one. My picture of Watkins is completely blurred except that she was tall and slim. The music, of course, was over my head and beyond me entirely.

Second night

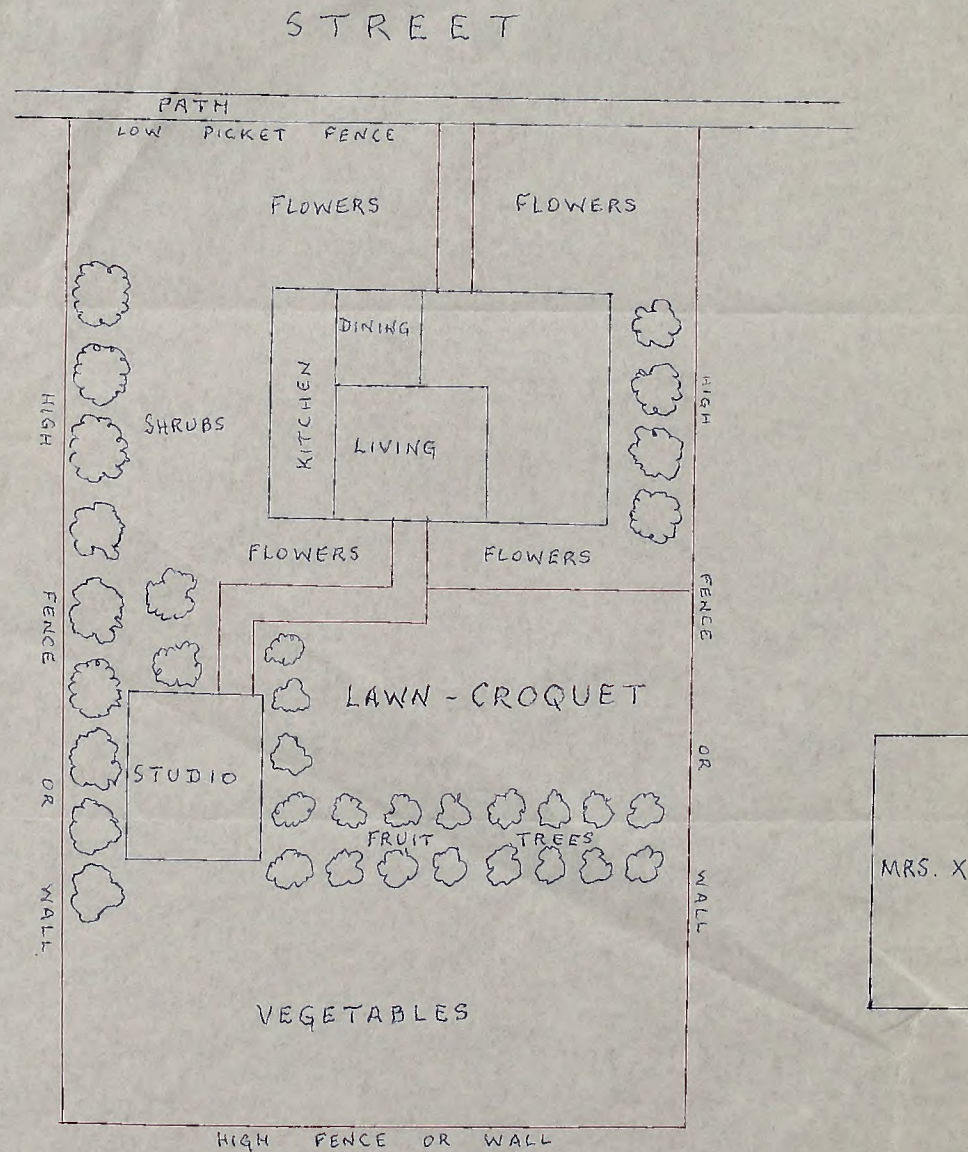
This charming little village, of about 200 or 300 souls, is situated about 10 miles from Cambridge and is about an hour's run from London. I cannot picture the village now but I remember that I liked it. The Watsons home was in the residential part of the village and, I believe, the Watsons owned it and were not renting it. The property was separate but not protected by any means, with houses on each side of it. I feel that the Watsons were just beginning to find their feet in those days. I believe that there were borrowings and past debts that had to be serviced (interest) and I think that the Watsons had to live frugally and carefully. No doubt the way had really diminished their spending power, as there were no continental or Asian concert tours to be had. However, they lived most happily and contentedly in their charming house and they seemed to have hosts of friends of many middle-class station living thereabouts in the countryside round Melbourn.

House

The house, set behind a small front garden, appeared to be low even though it had two storeys. The upstairs had dormer windows and the ceiling was rather low. As I remember it, the property measured about 75' along the street and about 50' in depth. It was a perfect oblong shape. I do not remember a great deal about the building except that it had a fairly small square living room, lined with low book-shelves on all sides, and the stuffed skins and sofa were covered with bright objects.

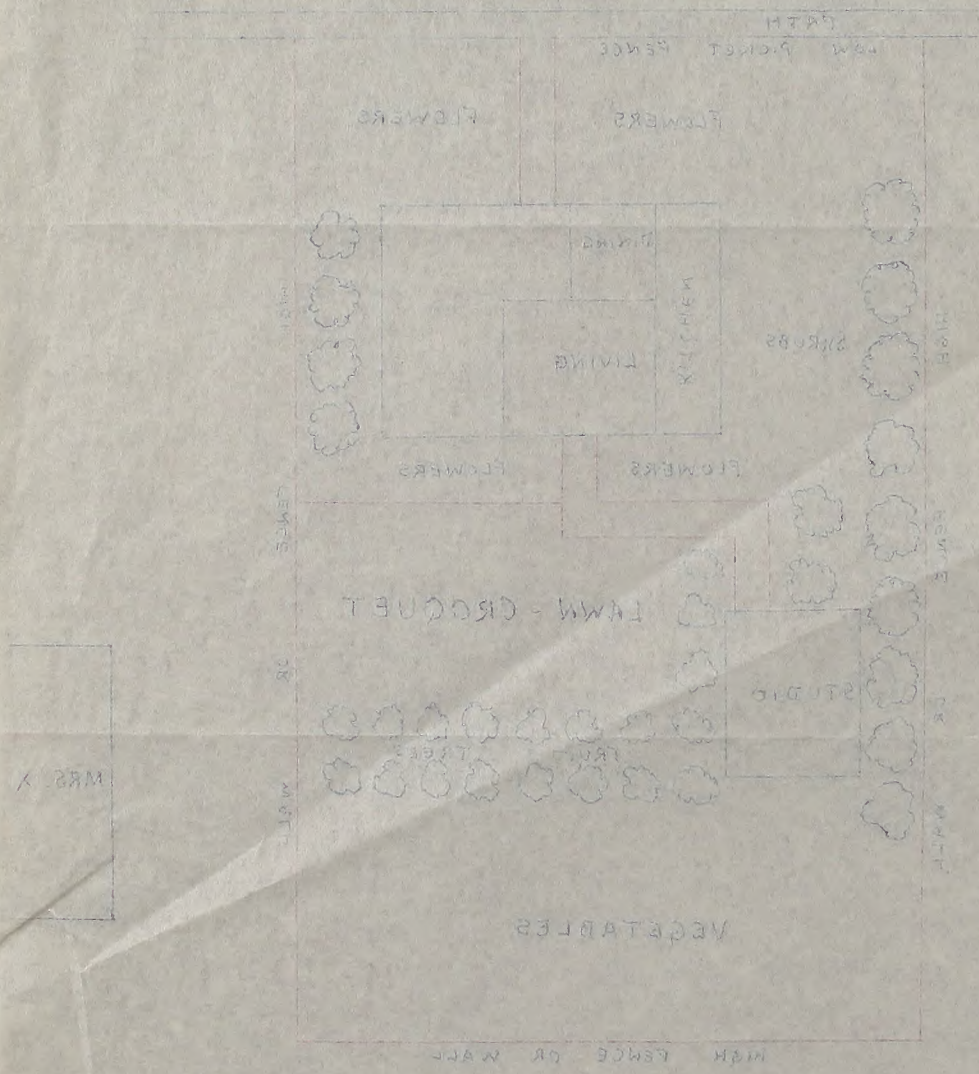
Plan of the Parlow House
& property at Meldreth,
as I remember it in 1919.

2.



Plan of the Willow House
a property at Hightstown,
as I remember it in 1919.

STREET



It was a most comfortable room — it was homey and furnished in good taste. The livingroom opened out on the back garden and there were garden chairs under the fruit trees — a lovely spot to sit. I do not remember having a single wet day during the whole of my visit. In fact, (2) England enjoyed a particularly nice Spring & Summer that year.

Garden

On page 2 I have sketched what I remember to have been the garden. I don't think that it was remarkable for its flowers, etc., but it was a most delightful place, with many different kinds of birds constantly singing in it. The croquet lawn was the sceneX of many tremendous battles (1) and, as time went on, I became rather adept at it. Mrs. X, the next-door neighbour, used to join us at the game quite frequently. She could see when we were playing from her place, and she fancied herself tremendously as a player. She was a large, tall horsey-woman, with protuding teeth. I suppose it was natural for her type to take complete charge of the game whenever she was playing. Kathleen & I had to be content to accept a very minor role indeed. It was on account of this that I had my only little falling-out with Kathleen and she took me to task one day when I objected a little too strenuously to Mrs. X's tactics. Ordinarily Kathleen was very even tempered with a mild outlook on things in general. Aunt Minnie was the man-of-business in the house and she managed everything. I believe (3) she did all the cooking, even though a young maid did the cleaning up. It was an exceedingly well-run menage. I am not sure as to whether it was Aunt Minnie or Kathleen, probably it was both of them, that had the excellent taste in house furnishings.

Library

It was certainly Kathleen who took such a great interest in buying books for the library. It was marvellously complete, for a comparatively small (4) private collection, and there were volumes on subjects galore. It was Kathleen who taught me then and there to systematize my reading by subjects and I never strayed from this system since. She used to choose two or three

It was a most comfortable room. It was neat and furnished in good taste. The livingroom opened out on the back garden and there were garden chairs under the fruit trees -- a lovely spot to sit. I do not remember having a single day during the whole of my visit. In fact, England enjoyed a remarkably nice spring & summer that year.

Chapter

On page 2 I have mentioned what I remember to have been the reason. I don't think that it was remarkable for its flowers, etc., but it was a most delightful place, with many different kinds of birds constantly singing in it. The ground was not the richest of many English gardens and, as time went on, I became rather fond of it. Mrs. X, the next-door neighbour, used to join us at the game quite frequently. She could see when we were playing from her place, and she landed herself tremendously as a player. She was large, tall, rosy-cheeked, with wavy hair. I suppose it was natural for her type to take complete shape of the game whenever she was playing. Besides, I had to be content to accept a very minor role indeed. It was on account of this that I had my only little falling-out with Kathleen and she took me to task one day when I objected a little too strenuously to Mrs. X's tactics. Ordinarily Kathleen was very even tempered with a mild outlook on things in general. But Minnie was the landlady in the house and she managed everything. I believe she did all the cooking, even though a young maid did the cleaning up. It was an exceptionally well-run ménage. I am not sure as to whether it was Aunt Minnie or Kathleen, probably it was both of them, that had the excellent taste in house furnishings.

Library

It was certainly Kathleen who took such a great interest in books, both for the library. It was remarkably complete for a comparatively small private collection, and there were volumes on subjects which Kathleen was known to have been reading by herself and I never strayed from this system since. She used to choose two or three

books on the same subject for me and practically stand over me until I had read them all. With the great number of books that she was buying then, she could not afford to buy leather-bound volumes, and I thought she was very clever in buying paper-covered ones that she could have bound later. She was tremendously fond of books and she certainly did much to develop my love for them too. All of us retired quite early at night but not to sleep. Each of us had at least one book tucked under our arms for reading in bed, until the Sandman caught up with us. (5)

Studio

You will notice that Kathleen's Studio was entirely separated from the main house, so that K. could not be disturbed no matter what happened. Every morning at 9 o'clock XX except Saturdays & Sundays, I believe, K. would start her five hours of practice in the Studio & woe betide any one or thing that disturbed her. She was very strict about not being disturbed. She practiced usually three hours in the morning and two hours in the early afternoon. Then she was free to do things with me for the rest of the day. Sometimes, just after she had finished practicing, K would allow me into the Studio and she would play my requests for a bit. The Studio was quite attractively furnished as a Music Room. At the time of my visit, K was getting ready for her first tour of the Dutch East Indies (I believe that this was her favorite region for concerts) since the war began. She loved the Dutch people and they loved her. Holland was a favorite of hers too. Like most artists, K had to travel to foreign lands to get the most acclaim. (6)

Bicycles

When I arrived at Meldreth, one of the first things that K made me do was to rent a bicycle for the duration of my stay. We went for 'bic' rides all around the surrounding countryside. Once we even rode up to Cambridge and put our machines on the train to come home. And nearly every weekend, there was a tennis, croquet, or just plain tea party at one of K's friends in the neighbourhood somewhere to which we rode our 'Bikes'. It was tremendous fun and K was such a good sport, in taking me around so much. (6)

books on the same subject for me and practically stand over me until I had read them all. The actual number of books that she was giving them, she could not afford to buy in the bookstores, and I thought she was very clever in giving me covered ones that she could have found later. She was tremendously fond of books and she certainly did much to develop my love for them too. All of us retired quite early at night but not to sleep. Even at us and at least one book tucked under our arms for reading in bed, until the morning came with us.

It was with her that I met the studio's studio was entirely separated from the main house, so that it could not be disturbed by anything that happened. Every morning at 9 o'clock I went to the studio to practice. I believe I would have been five years of practice in the studio & was not to be disturbed on that that disturbed day. She was very strict about not being disturbed and practiced usually three hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon. When she was free to do things with me for the rest of the day. Sometimes, just after she had finished practicing, I would follow her into the studio and she would play my requests for a bit. The studio was quite attractively furnished as a music room. The studio of my visit, I was not ready for her first term of the music. I believe I believe that this was her favorite room for practicing, since she was born. She loved the music and she loved her. I believe she was a favorite of hers too. This most of all. I had to travel to London to get the most of all.

When I arrived at the studio, one of the first things that I made me do was to rent a bicycle for the duration of my stay. We went for rides all around the surrounding countryside. Once we even rode on to Cambridge and met our mothers on the train to come home. And nearly every weekend, there was a tennis, croquet, or just plain tea party at one of the friends in the neighborhood somewhere to which we took our friends. It was therefore the best I was such a good sport, in taking me around so much.

Studio

Studio

My Visit

I suppose I should have told you at the beginning how I came to go to Meldreth. At the time, the war being over and I was merely putting in time while waiting for a boat passage back to my regiment, the Royal Canadian Dragoons, at Toronto, in the Spring of 1919, and was loafing around at Aldershot with the 11th Hussars, when an invitation arrived from Aunt Minnie to come up and stay with them. If I ever did know, I've forgotten how Aunt Minnie came to know that I was at a loose end, but I suspect that Mother must have had a hand in it somewhere. At any rate, I was tremendously glad to get away from those dreary barracks and to have a chance to get to know the Parlows in their home surroundings. I am only being truthful now in stating that my visit to them will always be one of the high lights of my life. I think it was in April when I got off the train in Meldreth and now I don't remember whether I stayed three or six weeks. All I know is that the weather was beautiful, that K and Aunt Minnie were wonderful hostesses and most kind, and that I had a magnificent time. (1)

Chess

There is another thing for which I have to thank K. She taught me how to play chess, and I am indebted to her for the many many hours that I've enjoyed at this absorbing game. K & I used to sit under the fruit trees and play chess by the hour in those lovely surroundings. She was a very good player and, if I remember rightly, I never did succeed in beating her. (2)

House (2)

ⁿ
I forgot to mention earlier that the house didn't have any electricity and all illumination was accomplished with candles, as Aunt Minnie very sensibly was frightened to use oil lamps. You can probably imagine how candelabras everywhere added to the already great charm of the house. At night, each of us carried our own candelabra up to bed. (3)

Library (2)

I also forgot to mention earlier that it was K who gave me the impetus to read non-fiction, instead of the trash I had been accustomed to. When I think about it, K did an awful lot ~~ME~~ for me, to help me to mature and grow up. I was only a child of about 21 when I met her and she taught me (4)

I suppose I should have told you at the beginning how I came to go to Kaituma. At the time, the war being over and I was merely putting in time while waiting for a post leaving back to my regiment, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, at Toronto, in the spring of 1919, and was looking around at the time with the idea of going to the States when an invitation arrived from my friends to come on a tour with them. If I ever did know, I've forgotten now, but while I was in the States, I was at a house and I suspect that other must have had a hand in it somewhere. I am only a guess as to how they got away from those dirty politics and to have a chance to get to know the things in their home surroundings. I am only being thankful now in stating that my visit to them will always be one of the high lights of my life. I think it was in April when I got off the train in Kaituma and now I don't remember whether I stayed there on six weeks. All I know is that the weather was beautiful, that I and that minute were wonderful postcards and most kind, and that I had a magnificent time.

There is another thing for which I have to thank B. The house was now to play chess, and I am indebted to her for the many many hours that I've enjoyed at this beautiful game. I used to sit up on the little veranda and to be told by the house in these lovely surroundings. She was a very good player and, if I remember rightly, I never did succeed in beating her.

I forgot to mention earlier that the house night I have my electricity and all illumination was furnished with candles, as I had no other very much as I happened to use oil lamps. You can probably imagine how comfortable everyone was at the already great heat of the house. At night, each of us carried our own candles up to bed.

I also forgot to mention earlier that it was V who gave me the books to read non-fiction. Instead of the time I had been accustomed to read fiction, I think about it. It was an awful lot for me to have to read, and I was only a child of about 21 when I met her and she brought me

10-11-19

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so many things that I shall never forget. She taught me to see beauty, where previously in my crude, untutored mind I had only been able to find boredom. For instance, it was she who taught me to understand the magnificence and the utter, simple grandeur of the Chapel at King's College, Cambridge, and the delights of the other colleges there. She taught me also how to find the simple pleasures in life -- listening to a nightingale sing in the dusk, watching the antics and habits of the several species of birds in her garden, etc. It makes me sad now to think that all these years have passed since, when perhaps I might have shared some of her society and perhaps learned more.

Cambridge

K took me up to Cambridge on three or four occasions, usually by train, and she showed me the sights of that beautiful city. While there one time, she told me of the nearly tragic accident that took place on the Cam. Frank Sawyer, an officer in the R.C.D's, now deceased, took K for a paddle on the Cam, one day during the war, and they upset. I don't remember many of the details but I believe neither of them could swim. However they both lived to tell the tale.

London

After I had said 'goodbye' and turned my back on charming Meldreth, I returned to dreary Aldershot in response to orders to be prepared to catch a boat on a day's notice. I really should have known that this was merely the Army's usual way of doing things and I spent another month or so lying around. During this time, I received a note from Aunt Minnie asking me to meet them in London and to see the Russian Ballet then playing there. So once again I enjoyed their company for a wonderful evening. It was my first experience with ballet and once again it was K ^{who} that opened my eyes to its magnificence. After the performance, K gave me another tremendous thrill by taking me back-stage and introducing me to Lydia Lopakova, then the rage of the social world and the ~~premiere~~ premiere danseuse of the Russians. This was the last time that I ever saw either Aunt Minnie or K. (9)

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 were previously in my circle. I had only been able to find
 London. For instance, it was the who told me to understand the significance
 and the other, the president of the College of the Capital of the United States,
 and the students of the other colleges there. The teacher was also not to
 find the other, the president of the College of the Capital of the United States,
 the first, the president of the College of the Capital of the United States,
 in her garden, etc. It makes me sad now to think that all these years have
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 she told me of the night of the beautiful city. While there one time,
 I was an officer in the R.C.M.D. now deceased. Took K for a while on the
 Cam. one day during the war, and they died. I don't remember any of the
 details but I believe neither of them could swim. However they both lived
 to tell the tale.

After I had said 'goodbye' and turned my back on charming Walsbyth, I
 returned to busy Walsbyth in response to orders to be present to catch
 a boat on a short notice. I really should have known that this was merely
 the army's usual way of doing things and I spent another month or so living
 around. During this time, I received a note from Aunt Winnie asking me to
 meet them in London and to see the Russian Relief Committee there. So
 once again I enjoyed their company for a wonderful evening. It was my
 first experience with ballet and once again it was a first experience with
 to its magnificence. After the performance I gave me another presentation
 thrill by taking me back-stage and introducing me to the backstage.
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Cambridge

London